

The Cluny Table

This is two articles. The first describes my slightly simplified copy of the Cluny table, which is a lot of work to make. The second is the bare bones/starving student version, which is less expensive and a lot less work but not as pretty and not nearly as close a copy of the original.



The Cluny Table

The Cluny Museum in Paris has a period peg-together table, shown above. I made a scaled down and somewhat simplified version, also shown above, with and without its top. My main change was replacing the carved panels in the original, which are well beyond my ability, with panels of quarter sawn oak—much easier to make and also quite attractive. The final figure shows the pieces of the table as I made it. I omitted the ornamental pieces at the ends of the upper supports and somewhat simplified the shape of the pieces, kept the vertical dimensions almost the same as the original, but scaled down the horizontal dimensions by about $\frac{2}{3}$.

The table is constructed in four layers. Two pieces cross to make the stand. Above them is a central pillar and four outer pillars, each joined to the center by a panel and each fitting into a socket below in the stand and a socket above in one of the pieces that supports the table top. In the original the panel is carved openwork; in mine it is plain quarter sawn oak. Above the pillars is the support for the table top, above that the table top itself. The bottom of the table top has four pairs of wooden tabs, positioned so that the support pieces pass between them; pegs attach the support pieces to the tabs. The tabs are attached to the table top both by glue and by two pegs running at a diagonal through each tab and into the table top.

Before trying to make the table, go over the figure carefully to figure out what fits into what and why. To make it a little easier, I have labelled:

X: The sockets in the stand pieces that the bottom ends of the four outer pillars fit into. Each is 1" deep, $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide, $\frac{5}{4}$ " long. The ends of the pillars that fit into them are $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide by $\frac{9}{8}$ " long. The end of each pillar is held into the socket by a $\frac{3}{8}$ " diameter peg running crossways, as shown. There is also a socket for the central pillar but it is not pegged.

Y: The sockets in the support pieces that the top ends of the outer pillars fit into. Each is $\frac{3}{4}$ " deep, $\frac{9}{8}$ " long, $\frac{3}{8}$ " wide. The ends that fit into them are $\frac{3}{8}$ " by 1".

Z: The tabs that attach the table top to the supports. Each has two diagonal holes to peg it to the table top and one hole crosswise to peg it to the support, as shown.

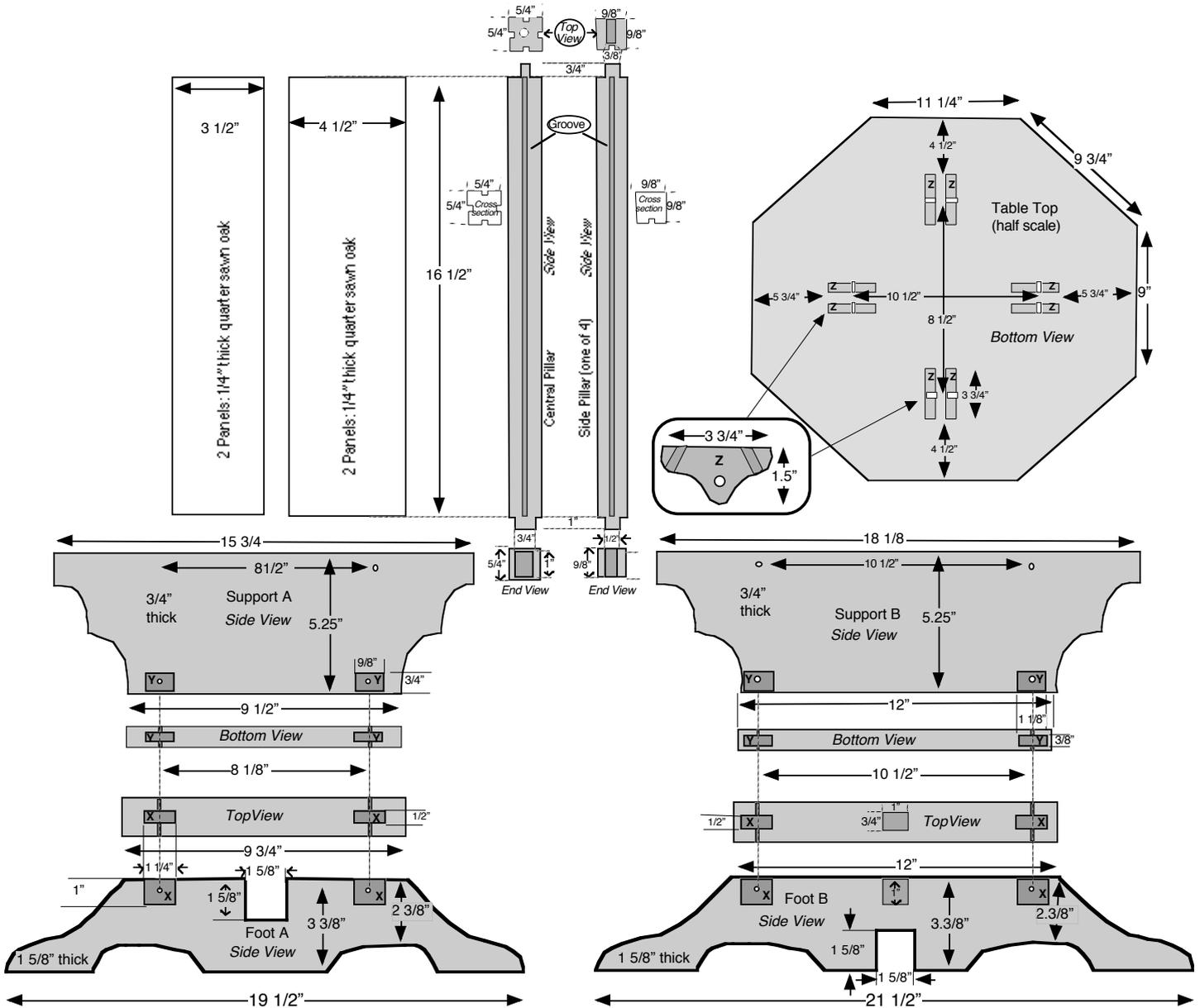
On the figure, everything is to scale except for the table top, which is half scale to the rest, and the side view of a tab, which is expanded to show the shape and the holes. All pegs are $\frac{3}{8}$ " diameter, all peg holes $\frac{3}{8}$ ". In making the table, precise placement, especially of peg holes, is obviously important. If pieces are going to peg together, assemble them and mark the exact placement of the holes.

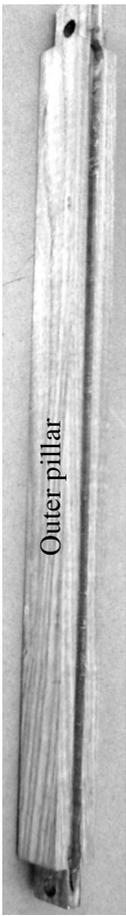
The central pillar is grooved on all four sides to fit the panels; each outer pillar is

similarly grooved on its inside face. The grooves are 1/4" wide, 1/4" deep. The pictures show details of construction. If you want to build a closer copy than mine, see <http://www.albionworks.net/Tables/ClunyTable.htm>. My estimates of the dimensions of the original are:

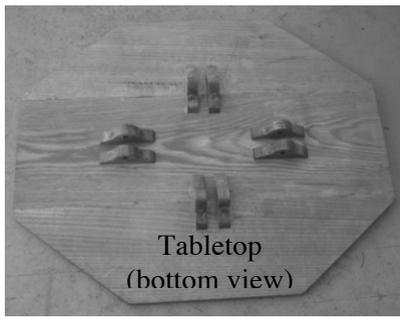
- Foot A: 30" wide, 2.75" thick, 4.5" high
- Support A: 14" + ornamental ends x 7" x 1"
- Foot B: 27" wide, 2.75" thick, 4.5" high
- Support B: 11" + ornamental ends x 7" x 1"
- Pillars: 17" x 1.5" x 1.5"
- Table top: longest dimension 40"
- Table height: 32"

[The figure has one mistake—I left out the cuts in the supports that let them fit together as the feet do.]

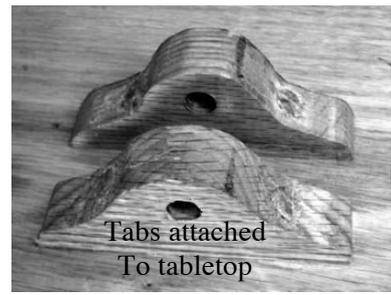




Outer pillar



Tabletop
(bottom view)

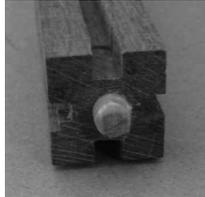


Tabs attached
To tabletop

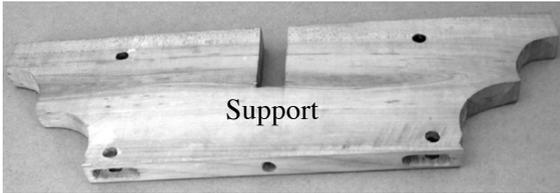
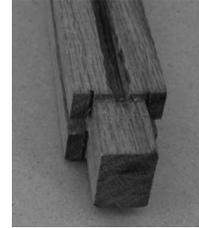
Outer pillar
top



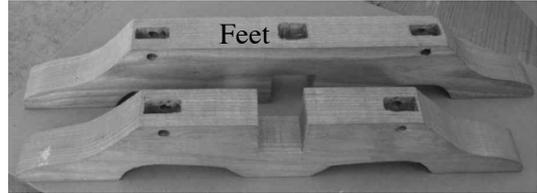
Center
pillar top



Center pillar
bottom



Support



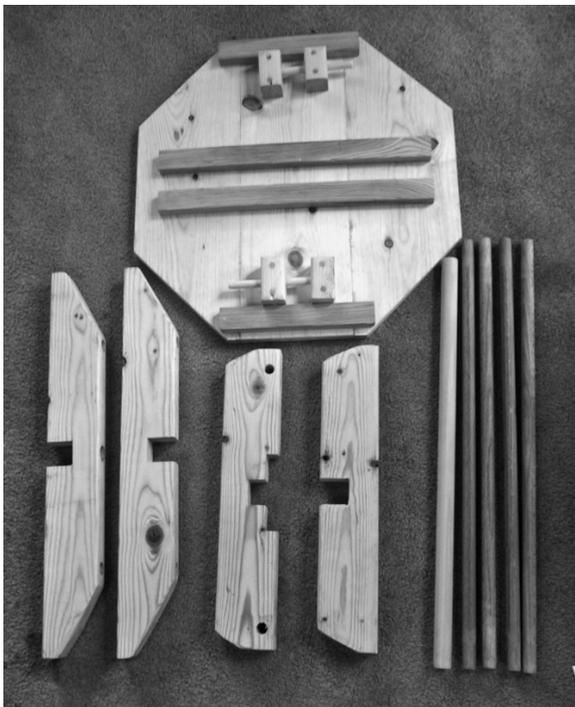
Feet



Center pillar

Pieces for the moderately accurate Cluny table (previous page)

The bare bones Cluny table (next page)



The Cluny Table: A Bare Bones Version

One of my objectives in researching period furniture is to find designs simple enough so that lots of people can make them for themselves; I sometimes teach a class at Pennsic entitled “Portable Period Furniture You Can Build in Your Dorm Room.” My first version of the Cluny table was somewhat simpler than the original, since I left off a number of ornamental details that would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for me to recreate. It was still quite a lot of work to build and a good deal of trouble to assemble and disassemble. A sufficiently talented and energetic college student could probably build it in his dorm room with the tools available to him—I know of one who built quite an impressive small siege engine under similar constraints—but it would be a lot of work.

For my second try, I did a bare bones version—mechanically speaking the same table, but simplified down to make it as easy to build and as inexpensive as possible. Drilling a round hole is a lot easier than chiselling a square one, so I made the holes round. A dowel in a drilled hole of the right size makes a pretty tight fit, so I left off the pegs that held the posts into the sockets in the original. I made more modifications along similar lines and used inexpensive softwood—2x4’s for the base and support, 1x8’s for the table itself. The result was a design that cost less than \$25 in materials and took about four hours of work to make. The pictures at left show the pieces and the assembled table. The figure at right shows the disassembled pieces and their dimensions.

The construction should be clear from the pictures and the previous article. The table top is made by gluing three lengths of 1x8 edge to edge, with four additional pieces glued underneath for reinforcement. It could have been made from one piece of plywood, but although a little less work it would not look as nice. The tabs are glued to the bottom of the table top, with $\frac{3}{8}$ " wooden

pegs as additional support. Each tab has a $\frac{9}{16}$ " hole for a horizontal peg, running through the $\frac{1}{2}$ " hole in the corresponding support to attach the table to the supports—I made the holes in the tabs a little bigger than the pegs to avoid having too tight a fit. A $\frac{3}{4}$ " dowel in a $\frac{3}{4}$ " hole makes a pretty tight fit, so I sanded the dowels down a little at the ends and rubbed beeswax on them for lubrication.

The table is a little under two feet square. It should be straightforward to scale the design up to something that four, or even eight, people could eat around.

